

Dear AHYMS-A family,

Recently two Postings were making the rounds on Facebook and the Web pertaining to Nasal Wash and the possible hazards of using (1) tap water and (2) commercial Nasal Wash solutions containing zinc.

The practice of Nasal Wash with a *neti* pot has been in use since ancient times and has many benefits, however, in light of the recent reports, it might be good to revisit Nasal Wash in terms of: (1) what it is (2) why do it, (4) what is in the solution, (4) how to do it, and most importantly, (5) what precautions to take.

1. What is Nasal Wash?

Basically, it is a way of cleansing the nasal passages, using a *neti* pot and a liquid solution, usually salt water. It is a time-honored yoga practice which has been used for thousands of years. The Sanskrit name for Nasal Wash is *Jala Neti* (“Water Cleansing”) and is recommended in many Hatha Yoga texts, such as the classic *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (“Light on Hatha Yoga”) by Svātma Rama. It is one of the *Shat Kriyas* (Six “Cleansing” Actions), along with *Trataka*, *Kapala-bhati*, *Dhauti*, *Nauli*, and *Basti*.

2. Why do Nasal Wash?

What are the benefits? Nasal Wash can clean debris (dirt, dust, smoke etc.) from the nasal passages and also keep the nasal lining moist. It can help remove bacteria from the nasal area and clear the sinuses, so as to prevent colds, hay fever and other allergies. It can bring emotional calmness and psychological clarity and help balance the breath flow in the two nostrils (*Ida & Pingala*) to open *Sushumna*.

3. What is in the Nasal Wash Solution?

Normally one does Nasal Wash with warm salt water. The water should be pure and germ-free. It has been recommended to use boiled distilled water and a pure salt, such as kosher salt or canning salt. The proportion of water to salt should be such that it is neither too much nor too little; either of these will cause discomfort. The consistency should be isotonic (like blood or like tears) at a minimum. A good proportion to start with would be about 1 teaspoon salt to 1 pint (16 ounces) of water. You can experiment. Being somewhat hypertonic (having *more* salt than the body concentration) does not seem to be a problem as evidenced by the various scientific studies of this practice.

4. How do you do Nasal Wash?

- a. First determine which nostril is flowing more freely. (We’ll call that more active, dominant nostril the *open* nostril.)
- b. Fill the *neti* pot (*loti*) with the salt water solution.
- c. While standing, lean over slightly and tilt your head so that the *open* nostril is up. Insert the nozzle of the *neti* pot and pour the water into the *open*

- nostril. Breathe through your mouth, relax and let the water flow. It should flow up and around nasal passages and then down out the *closed* nostril.
- d. Stand up, lean over slightly and *gently* blow out through *both* nostrils.
  - e. Follow these steps, (a) through (d), starting with the *closed* nostril. (These steps can be repeated.)
  - f. Finally, to clear the nostrils of any left-over water, do a loose, gentle version of the revolved triangle pose, with the right hand going to the left foot, looking up over the shoulder; the left hand going to the right foot, back and forth, back and forth. This can be followed by a *very gentle Kapala-bhati*-like breathing to dry any residue water. One can also do Child's Pose and then gently roll forward a little, as if starting to do a somersault. Then come up again and blow *gently* through both nostrils.
  - g. Note: There are also other methods of doing Nasal Wash, but the one described above is the most common.

## 5. Precautions

- a. Use pure water pure salt, and avoid commercial solutions with zinc. Most tap water in the cities is adequately treated with chlorine, but untreated water can cause a Primary Amebic Meningoencephalitis (PAM) infection, which is *very* dangerous. (Refer the Wikipedia article below.) In places where the purity of the water supply is uncertain, use filtered or reverse-osmosis water. Nasal Wash solutions with zinc have been reported to cause the loss of smell.
- b. Make sure the *neti* pot is as clean as possible. Drying out the *neti* pot between uses prevents the growth of organisms in stagnate water etc.
- c. Be *very gentle*. Never blow forcefully through the nostrils as it may push fluids into the Eustachian tubes and into the inner ear.

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## References:

- *Science of Breath* by Swami Rama et al (Chapter 3 “Nasal Function and Energy”).
- *Hatha Yoga Manual Two* by Samskriti and Judith Franks (out of print).
- Wikipedia on “Nasal Irrigation” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nasal\\_irrigation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nasal_irrigation) and “Neti” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neti\\_%28Hatha\\_Yoga%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neti_%28Hatha_Yoga%29).
- Paul Emerson’s audio and article: “Benefits of Nasal Wash.”